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COUNTDOWN TO KINDERGARTEN: Tips for Preparing Children for Their First Day

(Sacramento) – Back to school time often brings a mix of excitement and apprehension for California kids – particularly the more than 450,000 starting kindergarten this fall. To help prepare these first-time students, Kris Perry, First 5 California executive director and childhood development expert, offers parents and caregivers the following tips before this educational milestone:

Bring up the subject of school.

- Attending school should be an exciting new adventure, not a mystery for children. Discuss the activities a child should expect in kindergarten. Encourage older siblings or neighborhood children to share their positive kindergarten experiences.

Make reading a priority.

- Research shows children who spend time reading with their parents enter kindergarten better prepared for learning. Visit a local library to help kick start a child's reading skills. Try finding books about the first day of kindergarten.

Vaccinate, before it is too late.

- According to California law, children cannot enter kindergarten without up-to-date immunizations. Receiving required immunizations is an important step in preventing disease and helping children grow up healthy and ready to learn.

Set a schedule.

- Starting school offers an array of new experiences for children. To help ease a child's transition, set a schedule at home that closely resembles his or her school schedule. Following this schedule will help ensure children receive plenty of rest before their first day and adjust to a routine before they enter the classroom.

Practice basic skills.

- Practicing certain activities can help ensure that children are not only comfortable in the classroom, but also perform well. For example, it is most helpful for children to practice writing their names, know how to line up and be able to use common school supplies such as glue sticks, scissors and crayons. Children equipped with these basic skills are often more confident on their first day and beyond.

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Visit the school.

- To help calm a child's nerves before the first day of kindergarten, visit the school to become familiar with the new surroundings. If possible, allow the child to explore the school grounds and point out areas or activities he or she is sure to enjoy. Ask if the child's teacher is available to meet so the child recognizes a friendly face on the first day.

Encourage decision making.

- Give children choices to encourage decision making and teach responsibility. Involve children in deciding which outfit to wear on the first day, what nutritional lunch or snack to pack, and what school supplies to purchase.

For more back to school tips or for information about school readiness programs, please call First 5 California at 1-800-KIDS-025 (English) or 1-800-50-NIÑOS (Spanish).

About First 5 California

First 5 California, also known as the California Children and Families Commission, was established after voters passed Proposition 10 in November 1998, adding a 50 cents-per-pack tax on cigarettes to fund education, health, childcare and other programs for expectant parents and children ages 0 to 5. For more information, please visit www.first5california.com.

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